



**Testimony of James E. Shmerling, DHA, FACHE
President and CEO at Connecticut Children's Medical Center
to the Human Services Committee**

**Regarding SB 284- *An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status*
March 9, 2022**

Senator Moore, Representative Abercrombie and other esteemed members of the Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts about Senate Bill 284, *An Act Increasing the Age from Eight to Eighteen Years for an Income-Eligible Person to Obtain Medical Assistance Regardless of Immigration Status*.

I am submitting testimony in support of this proposed legislation because children who have a consistent source of health care coverage are more likely to have access to the health care services that they need and deserve. The past two years were tough for all of us and the challenges children currently face are great. From disruptions to their education, caregivers losing jobs, and social isolation, there are no shortage of ways that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected young people. The good news is that we can put kids on a path to success if we all work together to make them a priority. All children should be able to access high quality and affordable healthcare, regardless of where they live, how much their caregivers earn, or their immigration status. Consistent access to care improves the overall health and wellbeing of our children, allowing them to grow, learn and succeed to their fullest potential.

Before commenting on the bill, I wish to provide some background about Connecticut Children's, a nationally recognized, 187-bed not-for-profit children's hospital driving innovation in pediatrics. With over 2,800 employees and 1,300 providers on our medical staff, we are the only hospital in the State dedicated exclusively to the care of children. Although our main hospital campus is located in Hartford, we have over a dozen locations across the state and partner with many adult providers and health systems throughout the region to help our pediatric experts provide care to children from all corners of Connecticut. In addition to caring for kids in the clinical setting and our cutting-edge pediatric research, we remain committed to keeping children in our communities healthy through community-initiatives that help address the social determinants of health, because as we know, many of the challenges facing children and families have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senate Bill 284 would expand access to HUSKY to all children nineteen years of age and younger, regardless of their immigration status. Connecticut's HUSKY program provides health care coverage to our State's most vulnerable children but it overlooks a group that has particular vulnerabilities—children over the age of eight who are undocumented. At Connecticut Children's, more than half of our patients who require an inpatient hospital stay rely on HUSKY as do more than two-thirds of those who require care in our Emergency Department. A much smaller number of our patients are uninsured and some of those lack insurance coverage

because they are undocumented, but Connecticut Children's provides the care children deserve regardless of their insurance status. We will never turn a child away, but our pediatric experts know that children who have health coverage have better short and long-term health outcomes. Children with health coverage are more likely to access primary care, more likely to receive consistent care for chronic conditions like asthma and diabetes, and less likely to rely on the emergency room. Healthy children miss fewer school days and have greater school success.

Healthier kids today mean healthier adults tomorrow. Investing in our children is an essential step for building our future workforce and reducing the cost of their future health care needs. State policies must support the programs, services and delivery systems that will promote each child's optimal emotional and physical health. Please support this important legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact Emily Boushee (eboushee@connecticutchildrens.org), Government Relations Associate at Connecticut Children's.